

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?



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Editorial

This issue of *Fightback* is distinct from others. Whereas most *Fightback* issues have a range of credited contributors, from inside and outside the organisation, this issue is largely written by a single author (myself). There are two main reasons for this:

1. Practical: After running a crowdfunding campaign for the magazine in the first months of 2018, our time to produce issues was more limited than most years. An issue by one author is simpler to coordinate.
2. Thematic: As the coordinating editor, I had a very clear idea of how the 10 pieces in this issue should fit together, and directly writing those pieces was preferable to micro-managing writers to make their articles fit.

The topic of this issue – *What is Capitalism* – may seem straightforward. However, my experience is that while activists may talk about capitalism a lot, we don't always have the same conception of what this means. This is even truer discussing capitalism outside the small activist milieu. It would be absurd hubris to imagine this magazine issue will finally settle and define capitalism for everyone. However, I hope to contribute to developing a common analysis – if you disagree with the perspectives presented here, please do express your disagreement!

In addition to my own work, this issue draws on the work of other

thinkers who have dealt with these questions (check out the references if you find the ideas stimulating). Additionally, our fine Editorial Board is there to provide feedback before we go to print, and certain articles have been sent to friends and family for feedback (particular thanks go to Kassie Hartendorp and Bruce Anderson). So although this issue is primarily the work of one author, it is also a collaborative work.

As with the rest of *Fightback*'s published work, this is an unapologetically partisan, anti-capitalist perspective. The articles go beyond 'What is Capitalism' to discussing how society might be transformed for the better. Meanwhile, reality has already changed since Marx wrote, and he had the limitations of any human, so we have done our best to base our analysis on the reality that confronts us, not just reprinting 19th century slogans.

We hope that this issue will not only help readers form their own ideas, but also offer tools for explaining anti-capitalist ideas to the skeptical.

With the next issue, on Accessibility, we will return to your regularly scheduled programming – articles from a range of contributors. We are proud to announce that contributors to the Accessibility issue will be paid.

Ani White, coordinating editor

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1 Do we really live under capitalism?

In short: yes.

However, some claim that the regulating role of the state means that this system is not 'true capitalism.'

Capitalism can be defined quite straightforwardly, if tautologically: an economic system based on the private ownership of capital. This is a descriptive definition rather than an ideal one: *capital* can be defined as financial and productive wealth (shares, land, factories etc). This definition is not distinctly socialist: The Oxford Dictionary defines capital as "wealth in the form of money or other assets owned by a person or organization or available for a purpose such as starting a company or investing." (Later we will break this concept down further, but Oxford's definition will suffice for now).

In other words, capital is private property used to generate profits. This is distinct from previous social systems, such as indigenous societies, where land was collectively rather than privately owned. Under capitalism, an investor may own and profit from miles of irrigated land he will never visit, an inconceivable concept in most indigenous societies.

Although many libertarians define capitalism as a free market without state involvement, we again define capitalism straightforwardly: a system based on the accumulation and circulation of *capital*. The relationship between property owners and the state varies, but the property relations are the common feature.

The involvement of the state does not in itself negate capitalism. In fact, the state often serves capital. This is most obvious in the case of massive subsidies and tax breaks given to corporations. There are also more extreme cases: in Chile 1973,

a democratically elected socialist government was overthrown by a military regime that implemented pro-market reforms, the first of the so-called 'neoliberal' policy regimes that would soon sweep the world. By contrast, in countries such as Aotearoa and Australia, a relatively representative democracy operates alongside undemocratic private property relations. Democracy can be tolerated by the powerful, up to a point.

Even state regulations that help workers also stabilise capitalism as a whole. For example, clashes between labour and capital over the work-day were resolved in the interests of labour, with a state-imposed 8-hour work day, but this also prevented that bloody conflict from destabilising capitalism itself (it's also a reform that has largely slipped from our grasp again). Similarly, minimum wage laws guarantee a certain amount of social stability, as well as ensuring that workers have the money to buy commodities, thereby lubricating the profit system. Individual capitalists, by acting in their own interests – increasing the work day, cutting wages – destabilise capitalism as a social system. Through regulation, the state saves capitalism from itself.

The state also develops infrastructure necessary to capitalism. Roading, railways, and other national infrastructure are too expensive for any given capitalist to produce, so the state uses its accumulated resources to invest in this infrastructure (often giving individual capitalists lucrative contracts in the process). Taxes, seen by some right-wingers as an attack on capital, enable this investment that ensures a stable basis for capitalism.

The capitalist state also provides police, and the military, to protect

and enforce the capitalist system. The police first developed in 19th century Britain and the USA, not in response to any increase in crime, but in response to angry working-class mobs: riots, strikes and slave insurrections.¹

Even some nominal socialists claim that the state is inherently socialist, just as right-wing libertarians do. Bernie Sanders claimed that the military and police are socialist, because they are provided by the state. However, Irish socialist James Connolly explains the problem with this in his work *State Monopoly versus Socialism*:

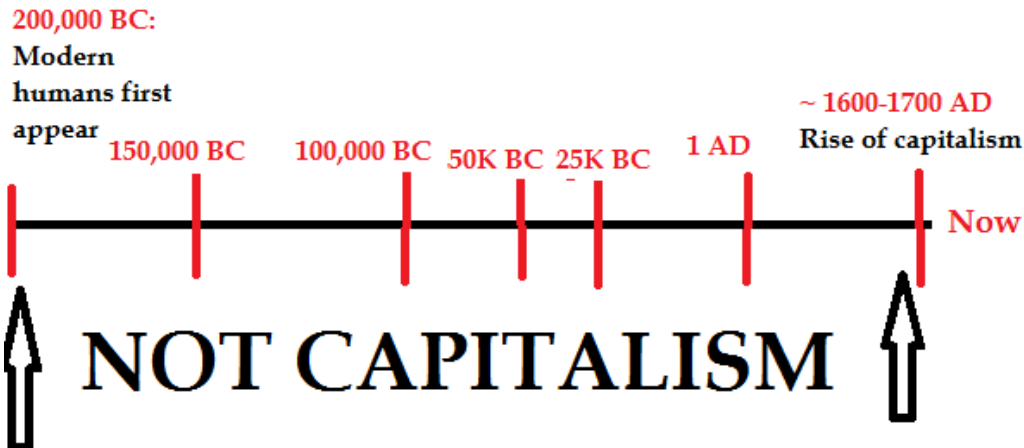
Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production... state ownership and control is not necessarily Socialism – if it were, then the Army, the Navy, the Police, the Judges, the Gaolers, the Informers, and the Hangmen, all would all be Socialist functionaries, as they are State officials... To the cry of the middle class reformers, "make this or that the property of the government," we reply, "yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property."

For revolutionary socialists, the question is not state or capital: state ownership can exist in a capitalist system. The question is private exploitation, or collective liberation. We may use the levers of the state at times, but only where they benefit liberation struggles, not because the state is automatically socialist. Capitalist states continue to predominate in the world today, and in Australasia specifically.

¹ David Whitehouse, *Origins of the Police*, Socialist Worker
<https://socialistworker.org/blog/critical-reading/2014/12/09/main-role-police-protecting-ca>

2 Is capitalism (or greed) part of human nature?

"Capitalism is in our human nature"



A common criticism of socialist politics holds that greed, or even capitalism, is necessary to human nature. However, most of human history was not capitalist. This social system has existed for approximately 300 years out of 200,000 years of human existence: in other words, capitalism makes up 0.15% of our time on earth. More complicated is the claim that greed, clearly older than capitalism, is fundamental to our nature.

The claim that 'greed is human nature' has a kernel of truth. Humans, like any creature, are naturally attracted to activities that are rewarded. If humans are rewarded for their greed, most will act accordingly. We can't all be Jesus. However, greed is far from the only human compulsion. Cooperation and care are also necessary to 'human nature.'

Cooperation and care are even necessary to capitalism. A private corporation requires huge amounts of cooperation: between workers in different departments, customers and workers, bosses and workers. If everyone acted on their own

individual impulses, companies would likely not function. Capitalism is a cooperative social system. Although the profits are privatised, the labour process is socialised. Without this cooperative labour, the luxuries enjoyed by the rich would be impossible.

Care is also necessary for human existence, and for capitalism. As Terry Eagleton highlights in *Why Marx Was Right*:

For a long time after birth [human beings] are unable to fend for themselves, and are thus in need of a prolonged period of nurturing... Even if the care they receive is appalling, infants very quickly imbibe some notion of what caring for others means. This is one reason why, later on, they may be able to identify a whole way of life as callously indifferent to human needs. In this sense, we can move from being prematurely born to politics.

Care must be built into any society. In this sense capitalism undermines human existence – unemployed single mothers are punished, rather

than helped, despite doing necessary work. Although capitalism does not always reward care work, care work remains necessary for capitalism, as it would for any society. People perform care without reward, showing that 'human nature' involves compulsions other than greed.

Greed is not outside the range of human nature – anything humans do is, by definition, a capacity of 'human nature' – but it is currently so central because it drives and is driven by capitalism. By contrast, a socialist society could reward collective behaviour. Returning to Terry Eagleton's *Why Marx Was Right*:

Take, for example, the idea of a self-governing cooperative, which Marx seems to have regarded as the key productive unit of the socialist future. One person's contribution to such an outfit allows for some kind of self-realisation; but it also contributes to the wellbeing of the others, and this simply by virtue of the way the place is set up. I do not have to have tender thoughts about my fellow workers, or whip myself

into an altruistic frenzy every two hours. My own self-realisation helps to enhance theirs simply because of the cooperative, profit-sharing, egalitarian, commonly governed nature of the unit. It is a structural affair, not a question of personal virtue.

Put simply, different societies reward different kinds of behaviour. A society that rewarded egalitarian cooperation would make avarice less attractive.

This would not be totally unprecedented. Anthropologists have highlighted 'gift economies', based on giving rather than financial exchange. In the lands that would later be named New Zealand and Australia, where indigenous societies lived off the land collectively, capitalism had to be imposed through colonisation (see 'How was capitalism established in Aotearoa and Australia?' in this issue). If capitalism is a part of human nature, why did so many people engage in bloody wars to defend their way of life?

Unless you're reading this as a historical text in a post-capitalist society (inshallah), all of us were raised under capitalism. We internalise its compulsions. When we wake up in the morning, we see Capitalism in the mirror, and blame the figure that stares back:

where the whole world is against us, we begin to take its part against ourselves, to avoid the withering sensation of being alone on our side.²

The notion of 'human nature' itself is debatable, hence the quotation marks. Humans are very adaptable. There are compulsions we all experience, like the need for food – but this does not mean human behaviour is permanently fixed in one form.

Now, with the complex cooperation that has overcome the scarcity of earlier societies, we could achieve an egalitarian society with greater comfort than ever before. Likely people would still harbour the occasional negative thought, but the point is to liberate ourselves, not to redeem all our sins. The primary barrier is not human nature, but that minority which benefits most from colonial capitalism, and resists any attempt at redistribution.

² Robert Maturin, *Melmoth The Wanderer*



3 How was capitalism first established in Australia and Aotearoa?

A state can be defined as a monopoly on violence: “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the *legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory.”³ For Marxist geographer David Harvey, “accumulation by dispossession [is] the hallmark of what capital is really about.”⁴ Put simply, a ruling class must establish sole control over land and resources.

So what was necessary to establish a capitalist state Australia and Aotearoa?

Firstly, the bloody dispossession of land from indigenous peoples, and secondly the importation of European labourers. While this colonisation by Great Britain is a common thread between Australia and Aotearoa, it also played out differently in each country, so this piece will be broken into two brief sections, before a conclusion.

This article cannot represent the complexity of indigenous knowledge and struggle. This is a *tauiwi* (non-Māori) perspective, intended to explain the motor of colonisation. If you want to engage with indigenous knowledge and history, scholars such as Moana Jackson, Ani Mikaere, Leonie Pihama, Ranginui Walker, and Gary Foley are recommended.

Aotearoa

In the 19th century, Britain was rent with economic crisis. Colonisation served two useful purposes: claiming new raw materials, and exporting surplus labour (workers without work). This was justified through race theory, which portrayed indigenous people as inferior.

However, direct Crown intervention

in Aotearoa was expensive. Until the late 1830s, unofficial actors – missionaries, traders and explorers – moved ahead of the Crown. The Crown only became directly involved when they developed a scheme of selling land in the colonies to prospective settlers, thereby funding colonisation.

To establish capitalism, the Crown had to transform the relationship between people and the land. Whereas *iwi* and *hapu* (Māori kinship groups) lived collectively off the land, capitalism required that the majority be separated from the land, forced to live off meagre wages (a process that had first been carried out with the dispossession of European peasants). That required systematically depriving *iwi* of their land.

Initially, a fraudulent Treaty was intended to establish the basis for Crown and settler ownership (with later struggles demanding that the Treaty be honoured). From 1840 to 1870, the Crown and settlers engaged in “rampant expropriation” of the land, as well as setting up a political infrastructure (with parliament established in 1854 on the British model). This colonisation drive led inevitably to the Land Wars, as *iwi* were not keen to part with their land.

Māori were initially excluded from production, driven onto ‘unproductive’ land. Wage labour was mainly provided by European settlers, until urbanisation in the 20th century led to more Māori joining the urban workforce – 8% of Māori lived in ‘defined urban areas’ in 1926, compared to 41.1% by 1996. By the late 20th century, urban and rural Māori would combine forces in leading a new wave of resistance.

Australia

Infamously, Australia’s colonisation began in 1788 with a penal colony in New South Wales. As with Aotearoa, European labour – in this case, initially, convict labour – was imported. Exploitation of convicts was brutal:

In April 1798 an Irish convict who worked in a gang in Toongabbee threw down his hoe and gave three cheers for liberty. He was rushed off to the magistrate, then tied up in the field where his ‘delusions’ had first overwhelmed him, and flogged so that his fellow-Irishmen might ponder of the consequences of challenging the English supremacy.

This brutally exploitative system lived alongside the collectivist society of the Aborigines for many decades, with tensions often flaring up. Although antipathy grew between Aborigines and settlers, Aborigines expressed sympathy at times with the brutal conditions faced by exploited convicts:

At the same time the Aborigines began to evince disgust and hatred for some features of the white man’s civilisation. When a convict was detected stealing tackle from an Aboriginal women in 1791, Phillip decided to have him flogged in the presence of the Aborigines to prove that the white man’s justice benefited blacks as well as whites. All the Aborigines displayed strong abhorrence of the punishment and sympathy with the sufferer. They shed tears, and one of the picked up a stick and menaced the flagellator.⁶

³ Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*

⁴ David Harvey, *Private Appropriation and Common Wealth, Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*

⁵ Evan Poata-Smith, *The Political Economy of Inequality Between Māori and Pakeha, The Political Economy of New Zealand* (Brian Roper ed)

⁶ Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*

In the 1820s and 1830s, Australia began to shift from its origins as a penal colony towards becoming an agricultural hub, with 'free' wage labourers increasingly imported from Britain. Throughout the 19th century, the settler population grew, as did appropriation of land – resisted by Aborigines. As in Aotearoa, military conflict was necessary for the Crown to take control, with frontier wars breaking out from first arrival right through to the early 20th century. Estimates indicate at least 20,000 Aborigines were killed in the frontier wars, and about 2,000 settlers. In 1901, Britain's existing colonies federated into a single capitalist nation-state: the Commonwealth of Australia.

Essentially, the capitalist state was imposed through the barrel of a gun.

Postscript: Is there hope?

This conclusion is focused on Aotearoa, due to my greater familiarity.

Waitangi settlements in total make up about \$1.6 billion, compared to about \$20 billion annual national income.⁷ This is woefully inadequate. As private appropriation of land was the basis of colonisation, only a radical redistribution of land and resources can address indigenous dispossession.

Constitutional lawyer Moana Jackson recently led a project consulting Māori on "Constitutional Transformation." Supported by *iwi* (tribes), but independent of the Crown, the working group conducted 252 *hui* (discussions) between 2012 and 2015. The report stressed the need for a balance between *rangatiratanga* (Māori self-governance) and *kāwanatanga* (Pākehā self-governance).⁸ However, the report focused on the *rangatiratanga* side: the question of *kāwanatanga* (Pākehā governance) remains open. Ultimately, Constitutional Transformation requires that not just Māori but

Pākehā take responsibility for transforming society. To quote Donna Awatere's *Māori Sovereignty*:

Set against our people has been the united strength of white people. The Māori now seeks to break that unity in the interests of justice for the Māori people... Gramsci's concept of hegemonic consciousness has relevance to Māori sovereignty. In hegemonic consciousness, a class puts its interests with other classes at a national level and establishes alliances with them. These alliances are necessary because changes cannot occur with the Māori on our own. White people have cut across class barriers to unite on the basis of white hegemony... To overcome this requires a restructuring of the white alliance.

Awatere ultimately despaired of this restructuring of white alliance occurring, advocated withdrawal from Pākehā left spaces, and later joined the political right. As a mainly tauiwi group, Fightback seeks to break the 'white alliance.' This is a cross-class alliance that leads white workers to believe they benefit from colonisation. In a sense this is true: Pākehā are less likely to be arrested, less likely to be imprisoned, and likely to be higher paid.

However, by supporting rich right-wing politicians, white workers ultimately vote against their own interests. Infamously, Don Brash's 'Orewa speech' against 'race-based funding' saw a surge in polls, particularly pronounced among manual workers. As revealed by Nicky Hager's *Hollow Men*, this speech was a cynical ploy by a politician who sought to deepen the neoliberal revolution, which would undermine the conditions of his blue-collar supporters. Whiteness is corrosive to working-class liberation. Standing with Māori for collective self-determination would ultimately free Pākehā workers from a system

that exploits all. Nobody's free until everybody's free.

To end on an optimistic note. During the Māori renaissance of the 1970s, as Māori resisted attempts to sell Māori-owned land at Bastion Point, the Auckland Trades Council placed a 'Green Ban' on construction at Bastion Point. Union members were not to participate in any Crown/settler-led construction on this site. Members of the Communist Party of New Zealand won the Trades Council to this position. Memories like this are the heritage we need to build on.

⁷ Bruce Anderson, Chapter 32: Redistribution, *A New Place to Stand* <https://itstimetojump.com/32-redistribution/>

⁸ THE REPORT OF MATIKE MAI AOTEAROA- THE INDEPENDENT WORKING GROUP ON CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/MatikeMaiAotearoaReport.pdf>

4 Where does profit come from?

Disclaimer: This article uses KFC often as an example. I have worked at a KFC. I was very bad at it. The research about the corporate structure is new to me, stocks and bonds are like another country.

Take a KFC store, rented from the corporation by a franchisee. How does the store produce profit? It's just a building.

For Marxists, the "material elements of capital" are "man [people] and Nature."⁹ Take the window of a KFC drive-through, an element of the 'capital' that is the KFC store. The window's glass began as sand; miners extracted the sand from an open pit; transport workers moved the sand into massive silos; through a complex scientific process in a factory, workers heated the sand, transformed it into liquid glass, flattened it with tin, cooled and solidified it, resulting in glass as we know it; workers cut, transported and installed the glass in the store window; a KFC worker now slides the window open, and hands over a delicious Zinger Burger. At every step of the way, workers transformed and re-transformed natural elements for human need. This is what the capitalists profits from; the transformation of 'natural' elements by workers.

So, there is no productive capital without labour (or Nature). By contrast, labour (not to mention Nature!) without a capitalist is possible. In the Argentinian occupied factory movement, workers took over factories and ran them democratically, instead of accepting redundancies. While these factories still operate within a capitalist market, their victory demonstrates how workers can operate without

capitalists – whereas the opposite is not true.

But if workers are not reliant on capitalists, where do wages come from? Let us return to KFC. Max Caulfield makes 50 burgers in one hour. Each burger is sold for \$5. She is paid \$15 an hour. In other words, her first 3 burgers have already covered an hour's wages in the first 10 minutes. 7 more burgers cover the price of ingredients, and a share of the store's fixed costs. The remaining 40 burgers in the hour make \$200. Stretch that out to 8 hours, and she will be paid \$120, while the company will make \$1,600 out of her labour. Max was not paid out of profits: rather, the profits were the surplus of the value of produced by her work. (Of course, other steps in the supply chain – the slaughter of chickens, the sale of the burger – also cost and reproduce capital, but the worker is essential at each step).

What about investment? Isn't the investor also essential to the process? Doesn't the investor take the risk? To get into this question, I'm going to go into a bit of detail about corporate structure and culture – if you get bored, the short version is that capitalism still sucks. So, investment requires prior capital. Capital may be inherited, as with Trump. It may be reinvested from a prior business: Warren Buffet serves as the entrepreneurial ideal, the teenager who brought a pinball machine for \$25, brought more pinball machines out of the profit from that, and so on.¹⁰ For a KFC store, a franchisee must hire the real estate to run the restaurant – KFC's owner Yum Brands don't so much run restaurants as hire large amounts of real estate to franchisees. Setup costs

are substantial,¹¹ so the franchisee is likely to be independently wealthy. Franchisee average profits aren't publicly available, but we can safely bet they're better off than their employees, and inconsequential compared to the CEO or owners. The franchisee may be a tyrant, they may be perfectly lovable, but their job is essentially to ensure the corporate machine continues unhindered. Yum Brands are very restrictive about how KFC stores must be run, down to minute details like how often you shake the chicken after taking it out of the brine (7 times): they must protect the brand, and 'product quality' factors into that. Occasionally stores go through periods of laxness, followed by tight clampdowns. Like many companies, Yum Brands is financed through debt. They have \$2.5 billion of long-term debt,¹² which sounds like a lot to me, but they haven't gone bankrupt so obviously they're getting some money back too (meanwhile McDonalds has 24.4 billion dollars in long-term debt, economics is counterintuitive). In 2016, Yum Brands was on the market selling \$2bn of bonds¹³ – a bond is basically selling your debt. Why would you buy debt? Apparently, bond buyers make money from the interest on the debt, or from random fluctuations in the market which bond buyers pretend they can predict.¹⁴ So, here we have our investor, let's call him Guy White: he just brought Yum Brands bonds on his laptop. Now let's rewind the corporate chain: he's earning interest on the capital loaned to a company for selling real estate to a franchisee who employs people to sell food. This brings us back to Max, who has just made her 100th burger for the day, and just before

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*

¹⁰ Brenton Hayden, Warren Buffet Knows It..., *Entrepreneur* <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/241196>

¹¹ Hayley Peterson, Here's what it costs to open a KFC, *Business Insider* <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/what-it-costs-to-open-a-kfc-2015-7?r=US&IR=T>

¹² Ryan Downie, 5 Restaurant Stocks With High Debt Levels, *Investopedia* <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/company-insights/070616/5-restaurant-stocks-high-debt-levels-yum-qsr.asp>

¹³ Adam Samson, Yum to offer \$2.3bn in new bonds, *Financial Times* <https://www.ft.com/content/84422df9-004d-3de8-8053-bcf5c52e93d6>

¹⁴ Nickolas Lioudis, How does an investor make money on bonds?, *Investopedia* <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/how-does-investor-make-money-on-bonds/>

she clocks off, been asked to clean up urine in the bathroom (not in her job description). Guy is now considering whether to invest in Lockheed Martin. The gap between Max and Guy is significant, metaphorically and literally. Of course, Guy is only one of many investors, one beneficiary of the vortex that is Yum Brands, with CEO Greg Creed earning a \$15.3 million salary in 2016, not to mention the profit extracted by owners.¹⁵ The most tangible, beneficial human service in this whole psychodrama, and KFC's most visible commodity, is the service of food. But the distribution of rewards for actually making and selling food is shaped like an inverted pyramid, or a tornado: the rewards get bigger the further up the vortex you go from the actual work of making food. And we don't need this destructive, exploitative structure to make food.

Of course, Yum Brands is not the only company on the market. Finance traders participate in an impenetrable blood-sport: the trading of debts, packaged into various exotic products, their origins ever more obscure. As we all saw in 2008, this is a house of cards. Even the most successful trader runs the risk of losing big and tragically having to sell his super-yacht. Marx used the term 'fictitious capital' for money that represents the promise of more money, rather than having any clear relationship to production.

The production process itself may even be fictitious, as with Enron's infamous scandal, where some of their power plants weren't even running in the first place. As Enron encouraged workers to buy shares, when the company collapsed, the loss felt by investors genuinely was unfortunate. David Harvey once observed that while he was excited about Syriza, he was also worried about how their winning would affect his pension (as pensions are increasingly financialised). Not all investors are demons, and capitalism has a way of drawing us all into complicity. But it's hard to conclude that the global financial market allocates goods and services

rationally, or justly.

So what next? What if machines replace our labour? Wouldn't that mean the worker becomes redundant, and the machine generates the profit? Some in the scientific community believe a 'Singularity' of accelerating artificial intelligence will replace human intelligence – essentially robots taking over, but potentially nice ones. That would be one way of transcending capitalism!

However, despite appearances, current trends do not point to an absolute replacement of human labour by machinery. Capitalists make certain jobs redundant through automation, but they also invest in new ones to make more profit. *Overall* unemployment still appears unaffected by rapid revolutions in technology. Employment growth still closely correlates with GDP growth, an old trend,¹⁶ not with technological changes.

If you take a supermarket as an anecdotal example, self-service kiosks mean that customers must now scan and bag their own groceries, but there are still many attendants available to help if anything goes wrong – the nature of the work has changed.

Observably, what technological development means is a rearrangement of the labour market, increasing precarity, underemployment, jobs that don't last, perpetual restructuring – not the end of work, but the destabilisation of work. For this reason, even many pro-capitalist theorists advocate a Universal Basic Income.

Automation has marched on since the inception of capitalism. Take the infamous 19th century struggle of the Luddites. The Luddites were textile workers who feared their work would be replaced by the new looms, which simplified the process of weaving. Previously a specialised form of labour, it was now becoming industrialised. Luddites sabotaged the looms. In a sense, they were absolutely right – their labour was

replaced – however, it was replaced by *people* operating looms. The labour process is transformed, not entirely discharged.

Perhaps the role of capitalists, and managers, is to coordinate this extraordinarily complex process... by casting formerly valued workers onto the streets and hoping the state will foot the bill (before complaining about the taxes leveraged to do so).

Democratic, non-profit co-ops of workers and consumers would be much better suited to meeting human needs sustainably. As mentioned before, worker-owned factories operate from Argentina to Spain's Mondragon, with democratic decision-making structures and no need of bosses.

In sum: Capitalists need us, we don't need them.

15 David A Mann, Pay for CEO of leaner Yum Brands more than doubled last year, *Louisville Business First* <https://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/news/2017/04/10/pay-for-ceo-of-leaner-yum-brands-more-than-doubled.html>

16 Doug Henwood, Workers: No Longer Needed?, *LBO News* <https://lbo-news.com/2015/07/17/workers-no-longer-needed/>

5 Is slavery essential to capitalism?

African American slavery is indisputably an ugly stain on history. It was also necessary to the establishment of modern capitalism.

Until about the mid-1970s, historians treated American slavery as a pre-capitalist institution. Now, scholars increasingly highlight that Southern slavery was a key to establishing the US position in the world economy. More than half of US exports in the early 19th century consisted of raw cotton, extracted on slave plantations; slaves were employed in many more industries than cotton-picking; the Northern economy relied in part on the Southern; and many former slave owners would become established in 'post-slavery' capitalist institutions.

Although Northern capitalism had its advantages over Southern slavery (for example, wage labourers must not be housed by their employers), the system died because the abolitionist movement killed it:

Slavery did not die because it was unproductive or unprofitable, as some earlier historians have argued. Slavery was not some feudal remnant on the way to extinction. It died because of violent struggle, because enslaved workers continually challenged the people who held them in bondage... and because a courageous group of abolitionists struggled against some of the dominant economic interests of their time.¹⁷

So now, has slavery been abolished? Sadly, no. Instead, it has been outsourced: through the prison system (exempted from the abolition of slavery in the US constitution), and through border regimes. In 2013 the United Nations estimated that roughly 27 to 30 million individuals are currently caught in the slave trade industry.¹⁸

A report on labour conditions in NZ waters found that fishermen worked 15 to even 53 hours, for as little as 49 cents an hour.¹⁹ Many ships fly under 'flags of convenience', flags of countries without shipping regulations, despite the owners and crews not coming from those countries. Banning 'flags of convenience' would make legal abuses easier to solve, and is a key demand of maritime unions internationally.

Laws and regulations can in some cases protect these workers. In Aotearoa, the International Transport Federation hires an inspector to examine ships in New Zealand ports for compliance with labour laws. Let me repeat that, however: *one inspector*. Attempting to overcome modern slavery in shipping is like attempting to stop a tsunami with a plunger.

It comes down to the bottom line. Corporations will do anything to extract profit and cut wages, below \$1 an hour if possible. This can be stopped in various places and times, through both laws and collective action, but while profiteers run labour processes in general, they will always utilise slavery where they can get away with it.

¹⁷ Sven Beckert, Slavery and Capitalism, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* <https://www.chronicle.com/article/SlaveryCapitalism/150787>

¹⁸ Lauren Bradford, Modern day slavery in Southeast Asia: Thailand and Cambodia, *Inside Investor* <https://web.archive.org/web/20150323032459/http://investvine.com/modern-day-slavery-in-southeast-asia-thailand-and-cambodia/>

¹⁹ Tess McClure, Slavery on NZ seas: rape, bonded labour and abuse widespread on fishing boats, *Stuff Business Day* <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/68739974/slavery-on-nz-seas-rape-bonded-labour-and-abuse-widespread-on-fishing-boats>



6 Is capitalism a Jewish conspiracy?

Stop me if you think that you've heard this one before. In a 2012 Facebook post, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn defended a mural by New York artist Mear One. The mural depicted a cabal of bankers ruling the world. More recently in 2018, the post was dredged up to prove Corbyn's anti-Semitism. He quickly apologised, saying he had not paid the mural close enough attention.

What is notable here is not the original event itself, nor Corbyn's personal views. The issue is the failure of many on the left to detect anti-Semitic tropes. During the controversy, Corbynistas took to Facebook in droves to argue the mural was in fact legitimate anti-capitalism.

Corbyn's defenders argued that anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism. However, the mural had no references to either Palestine or Israel – the only useful definition of modern political 'Zionism' refers to the state of Israel, not Jewish people in general. Equating Jewish people with Israel is the preferred method of two counterposed groups: Zionists and anti-Semites. Many Jewish people do not support the actions of the Israeli state. The Palestinian cause, like the socialist cause, is discredited by any association with anti-Semitism. There is no good reason to bring up Israel when discussing Mear One's mural.

Moreover, the mural deployed uncomfortable anti-Semitic tropes. The artist presents a circle of large-nosed financiers, conspiring to rule the world, with an Illuminati symbol in the background. Before analysing this image, it's worth noting some tropes of anti-Semitism: Jewish people are often depicted with big noses, and as a financial elite conspiring to rule the world.

The use of an Illuminati pyramid is the first obvious clue, reflecting a conspiracy theorist mindset. The noses of the conspirators are also larger than life. The six historical figures sitting around the table are an "elite banker cartel" in the artist's words, but there are no capitalists from other industries – factory owners, or farmers, tend to get a free pass in the conspiracy theorist mindset – whereas finance capitalists are depicted as a



separate race of leeches preying on the productive national economy. The artist includes Baron Rothschild, a significant dog-whistle, representing a Jewish family whose influence in the 21st century is wildly overstated by conspiracy theorists.²⁰ To simplify, compare Mear One's mural with the Polish Nazi poster reprinted on the left: six large-nosed figures framed by a Star of David, sitting around a table which crushes the global majority (Polish text translates to 'Soviet Pyramid'). This is not, to put it lightly, an artistic legacy anyone should want to be associated with.

Australasia's political culture isn't immune to these memes. New Zealand's former Prime Minister John Key, who had a Jewish background, was repeatedly caricatured with a large nose in political cartoons. Dumping the subtlety, some charming individual decided to graffiti the word "Lying Jew Motherfucker" on a Key billboard. There are many good reasons to dislike John Key – his Jewish background is not one.

Although Aotearoa's billboard defacement is a particularly overt example, subtler forms of anti-Semitism pervade conspiracy theorist accounts of capitalism. If you will forgive an extended quote, Matt Bolton and Frederick Harry Pitts explain the problem with conspiracy theorist anti-Semitism well:

[A] critique of capitalism which focuses only on the machinations of the "1 per cent" fails to understand how fundamentally capitalist social relations shape the way in which we live – capitalists and bankers included. It does not grasp the extent to which "real" industrious production and intangible "abstract" finance are inextricably entwined. The pursuit of profit is not a choice in capitalism, but a compulsion. Failing to do so leads to bankruptcy, starvation and death. Nor are banks and the international financial sector an unproductive parasitical outgrowth undermining the

vitality of the "real" national economy. They are that economy's precondition.

The results of this incessant pursuit of profit, facilitated by the global movement of money, are by no means equal, and to that extent Corbyn and his supporters are right to highlight the widespread economic disparities in society. Indeed, the danger of conspiratorial thinking on the left is that it does in some ways "reflect a critical impulse", a suspicion about the world and its forms of power.

It is also why, as the sociologist David Hirsh has argued, anti-Semitism can present itself as a progressive and emancipatory force, a valiant attempt to rid the world of the evils dragging it down. It replicates the way that anti-migrant racism has become a sign of one's commitment to a downtrodden "white working class" in the aftermath of Brexit.

Therefore to dismiss the existence of anti-Semitism on the left as a minor problem compared with that of the right is to fail to heed the risks that the two forms can, on occasion, complement each other. A critique of capitalism based on the need to eradicate "globalism" is politically ambiguous at best, able to be utilised by the far-right as easily as the left.

What this lapse from critical to conspiracy theory suggests is that the anti-Semitic tropes which pervade the Corbyn-supporting "alt-media" and activist base, as well as Corbyn's own dubious brand of "anti-Zionism" and "anti-imperialism", are not mere contingencies, but the logical outcome of the movement's morally-charged, personalised critique of capitalism as conspiracy.

This has implications for how

Labour addresses the current crisis. The specificity of left anti-Semitism arises partly from a foreshortened critical impulse imbued with a racism that punches upward, rather than down. Building an alternative therefore requires much more than expulsions of "pockets" within the Labour Party.

What is needed is a commitment to education and consciousness-raising capable of replacing bad critiques with good- and Corbyn showed yesterday that he might be prepared to lead from the front. The work of [Jewish Marxist theorist Moishe Postone] would be an excellent place to begin. What it shows is that, if Corbyn is as serious as he says he is about militant opposition to anti-Semitism, his worldview as it is may not survive intact. Rather, it must be radically revised and rethought.²¹

At a glance, Mear One's mural could be mistaken for anti-capitalism, and that is precisely the problem. Most capitalists are not Jewish, and most Jewish people are not capitalists: fixation on a minority of Jewish bankers is a dangerous diversion. In a NZ context, locally owned 'productive' agricultural companies Talley's and Fonterra are as craven as any finance company, so the focus on 'international bankers' would be a diversion even without the dog-whistle. As socialists, we need to be able to clearly identify and distance ourselves from anti-Semitic tropes, especially those in 'left' garb. Perhaps anti-Semites are just bad apples, but the origin of that metaphor goes: one bad apple spoils the bunch.

Those who followed the Corbyn anti-Semitism row are likely aware of the happy ending (well, it never ends). Corbyn attended a seder held by Jewdas, a Jewish radical group. As far-right rag the Daily Mail²² reported in shocked tones, those in attendance held beetroots in the air and cried:

"FUCK CAPITALISM!"²³

²⁰ Brian Dunning, Deconstructing the Rothschild Conspiracy, *Skeptoid* <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4311>

²¹ Matt Bolton and Frederick Harry Pitts, To combat left anti-semitism Corbynism must change the way it sees the world, *NewStatesman* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/03/combat-left-anti-semitism-corbynism-must-change-way-it-sees-world>

²² A publication which literally endorsed the Nazis in the 1930s.

²³ Andrew Pierce, They raised a beetroot in the year and shouted f*** capitalism..., *Daily Mail* <https://donotlink.it/jl1N>

7 Does the internet transcend capitalism?

In 2015, a breathless, widely circulated Guardian article by somebody called Paul Mason declared that the internet is fostering 'postcapitalism'.²⁴ Mason argued that the old forms, such as the political party, have been transcended (ironically, not long after, Mason endorsed Syriza,²⁵ a political party).

In theory, Mason's argument for online 'postcapitalism' is understandable: the internet suggests post-scarcity. However, this is a case of the "forces of production" (new technology which enables new possibilities) clashing with the "relations of production" (who has the power and resources, and why they might prevent change). The possibility of post-scarcity – endless free copies of the same content – is prevented by corporate dominance.

Potentially infinite newspaper articles or academic pdfs are held behind paywalls; music and television are restricted to paid streaming services, or regionally restricted; cash-poor media addicts end up on piracy websites riddled with sleazy spambots (perhaps not the greatest injustice of capitalism). In a particularly ironic example, publisher Lawrence and Wishart demanded that the free-to-all website Marxists.org take down the largest English language collection of Marx & Engels' writing available: two writers who are both long dead, and dedicated their lives to eradicating private property.

Although technically nobody 'owns the internet', most users' experiences are shaped by corporate domination. Most of our time online is spent on corporate-owned websites like Twitter and Facebook, who have the right to censor any content they consider unsavoury (note: this is

not necessarily such a terrible thing, as with the censorship of fascist accounts, but giving corporations the right to determine who speaks publicly sets a dangerous precedent). Controversy about Facebook's data mining shows how corporations continue to surveil our lives, albeit in innovative new ways. Returning to Paul Mason, he advocates breaking up Facebook and other monopolies, whereas fellow 'postcapitalism' theorist Nick Srnicek advocates nationalisation of Facebook and similar platforms.

Communist Jodi Dean argues that the internet is a new 'zero level' of social life,²⁶ a fundamental background that frames our whole existence. While some treat interactions on the internet as irrelevant to 'real life', they in fact frame everyday social life. Ordinary conversations often refer to the latest online controversy, in the same way 'water cooler conversations' used to refer to the latest on television. Dean further argues that the internet favours contestation over consensus. The spread of 'Fake News' propagated by the crypto-fascist alt-right may have helped swing an election in the most powerful nation on earth. We cannot be too complacent about similar movements in Aotearoa or Australia, even if they are currently marginal. It's equally self-defeating to either confine our radical practice to the internet, or dismiss 'internet politics' as irrelevant.

The internet is the real world, integral to everyday life. However, rather than the internet transcending power struggles, power struggles transcend the internet. Communication technologies mediate a wider social world. The old war continues, but the terrain has changed.

²⁴ Paul Mason, Postcapitalism, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun>

²⁵ Paul Mason, 'Hope begins today'..., *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/28/greek-people-wrote-history-how-syriza-rose-to-power>

²⁶ Jodi Dean, Why the Net is not a Public Sphere, *University of Oregon* website http://pages.uoregon.edu/koopman/courses_readings/phil123-net/intro/dean_net_publicsphere.pdf



8 Is Marxism just about factory workers?

In short: no. Or, it shouldn't be.

A Marxist analysis of capitalism highlights who owns the means of production: farms, factories and so on. Most people in capitalist society do not own factories. That includes the unemployed, white collar, blue collar, pink collar, public-sector workers, students, caregivers, most self-employed people,²⁷ and peasants – although there aren't many peasants around these days. Workers are those compelled to sell their labour to live, whether they currently do so or not.

Although most people share a common dispossession, we also have diverse experiences, and distinct social positions. Caregivers may do essential work, but it's distinct in purpose and experience from factory work. Tithi Bhattacharya outlines this relationship:

If workers' labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker? Put another way: What kinds of processes enable the worker to arrive at the doors of her place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society? What role did breakfast play in her work-readiness? What about a good night's sleep?²⁸

These basic needs are often met or assisted by unpaid, or underpaid caregivers. Marxist feminists have focused on this work, often performed by women, terming it *social reproduction*. Caregiving work reproduces not just the person, but the whole social system (you can't have capitalism without workers, workers without food, food without a cook – often cooking free of charge). While recent socio-economic shifts may have undermined the

'traditional' nuclear family, Time Use Surveys show that women still perform most unpaid work.

Various forms of wage labour, other than factory work, are also clearly necessary to capitalism. Sales, banking, translation, and various other jobs lubricate a complex social system. Capitalists would not pay workers if they were unnecessary. Public-sector workers maintain the state and social services, stabilising the social system (for better or worse).

Unemployed people are the most dispossessed, of course. Despite regular propaganda to the contrary, unemployment is a structural failing rather than a personal one. As a socialist friend of mine put it, did everyone just suddenly get lazier in the 1980s, when unemployment rose? In Alister Barry's documentary *In a Land of Plenty*, Susan Snively, a member of the Reserve Bank Board of Directors during the crucial reform period of 1985-1992 states:

It was a manageable thing for the Reserve Bank to use unemployment as the way to get wages down. It was far easier than any other means of getting inflation down. So they used it.

Even though insiders admit that unemployment is a structural rather than personal matter, unemployed people face routine abuse and humiliation, from national television to WINZ offices. Auckland Action Against Poverty has blazed a trail in challenging this bullshit, supported financially by FIRST Union: the union movement as a whole must do more to connect the struggles of employed and unemployed workers.

Marx focuses on industrial workers

not because they are somehow better than others, more heroic, or more oppressed. Rather, he focuses on industrial workers because they directly produce commodities, the fundamental basis of the profit system. Industrial workers are not the only people oppressed by capitalism, but they pump the heart of the machine. You couldn't have finance without ore, sheepskin or steel; you could have these things without finance.

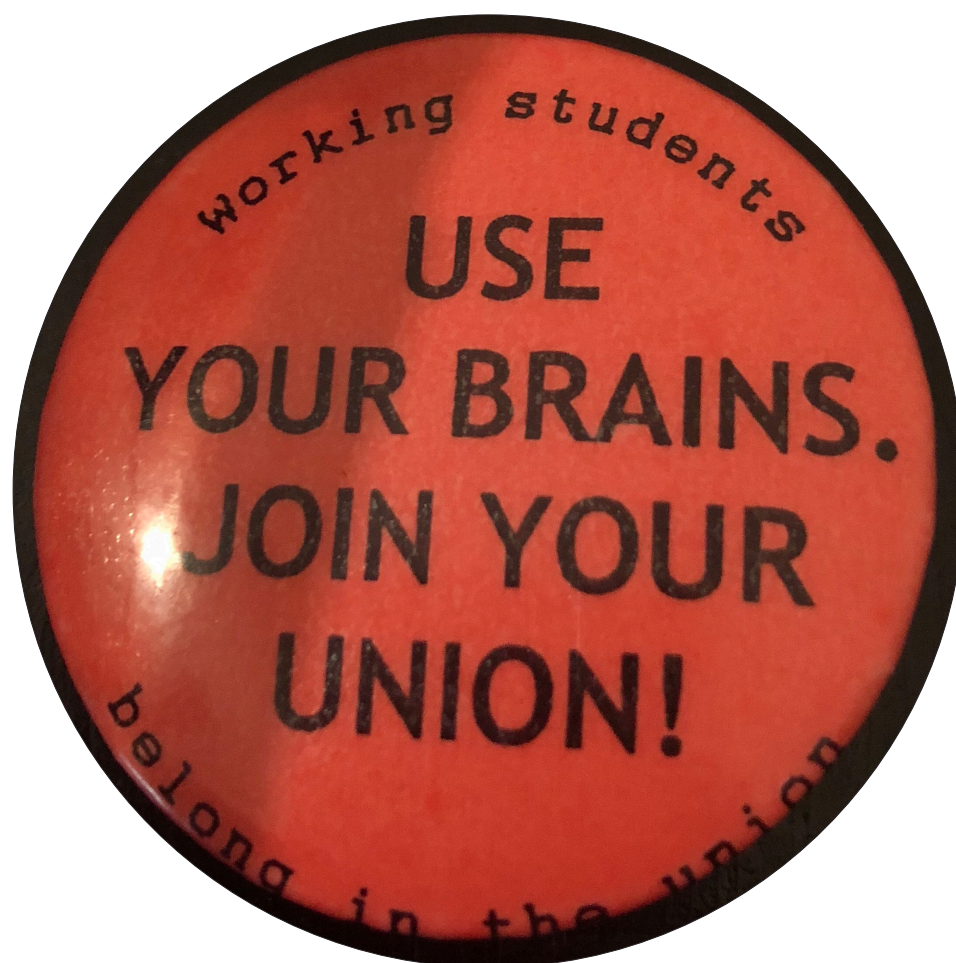
Direct disruption of industry interrupts capitalism in a way that other tactics do not – such as voting, or rallies at parliament. This is not to deny we should use other tactics, but to recognise their limitations. Collective, direct action can be powerful and liberating in a way that more symbolic, or isolated actions are not. If workers keep the heart of capitalism pumping, they can also stop the blood-flow. Classical Marxists therefore focus on the strike, the withdrawal of labour at the point of production.

Restructuring of the global economic system has also restructured these points of resistance. Now 10s of 1,000s of factory workers strike in China, whereas factories have largely retreated in relatively prosperous nations such as Australia and Aotearoa.

Yet global restructuring has also opened up new sites of struggle in the 'deindustrialised' nations. Although strikes are rare nowadays, and only around 10% of the private sector are unionised, workplace organisation is growing in unexpected areas. As the service sector has grown, it has also become increasingly militant, with fast food workers carrying out strike actions from Aotearoa to the USA. For decades union leaders saw fast food

²⁷ Depending on the size and nature of their business – particularly whether they have employees.

²⁸ Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*



workers as impossible to organise.

In Aotearoa, most union members are now women,²⁹ in contrast to the stereotype of the male breadwinner. The recent nurses' struggle in Aotearoa, or the teachers' strikes in the USA, both powerful struggles showing deep community roots, demonstrate a shift in the union movement towards feminised industries: care, service and public-sector work.

Meanwhile, the so-called 'logistics revolution' – a move towards automated, rapid global circulation of goods – has opened up 'chokepoints' where circulation can be disrupted: "the containerization of bulk goods now allows a single dockworker to do what it took an army to accomplish in the past."³⁰ In automated ports, a small amount of people enable a large amount of goods to circulate. Ports remain strongly unionised, so blockades remain very disruptive.

Blockades may be led by workers, or by the wider community – but they are strengthened if community

groups form links with unions. In the USA, blockades led by Occupy Oakland and the BDS movement have shut down ports, with the support of striking port workers. In Aotearoa, strikes against nuclear shipping played a role in winning the nuclear free policy. As these cases demonstrate, strikes need not be limited to the fight for better wages: they are also a tool in the wider transformation of society.

We cannot and should not return to the age of the Western male breadwinner. However, union and workplace organisation remains a key to broader liberation struggles. If you're working, join your union! In the likely event your worksite is not unionised, you can find your union online:

- **Aotearoa:** union.org.nz/find-your-union/
- **Australia:** australianunions.org.au/affiliates

²⁹ Sue Ryall & Stephen Blumenfeld, Unions and Union Membership in New Zealand..., Victoria University of Wellington website <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/som/clew/publications/new-zealand-union-membership-survey-report.pdf>

³⁰ Charmaine Chua, Logistics, Capitalist Circulation, Chokepoints, The Disorder of Things <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2014/09/09/logistics-capitalist-circulation-chokepoints/>

9 What about ethical capitalism?

Socialists do not believe ethical consumption choices, or ethical business strategies, can solve the systemic problems threatening life on earth.

For example, a plant-based diet may avoid the excesses of factory farming, but not exploitation of humans. In Australia and Aotearoa, fruit and veggie farms exploit migrant workers in slave-like conditions. A study by ABC's Four Corners found that Australian farmers who abided by the rules were dropped by supermarkets.³¹ This is not because the supermarkets are evil: they were simply fulfilling their legal obligation to serve the bottom line, by opting for cheaper sellers.

Perhaps the solution is Fair Trade fruit and veges, avoiding the brutalisation of both humans and animals? However, independent studies attempting to quantify the effects of Fair Trade have found that farmers in Fair Trade cooperatives did not have a higher average income than those in other cooperatives. Likely the biggest reason was that cooperatives controlled the premium, rather than farmers. Many farmers were unaware that the premium even existed.³²

This does not necessarily mean Fair Trade is a malicious scam. Many in the Fair Trade movement have excellent intentions, and some lives are likely improved. However, the nature of the global market makes it difficult (if not impossible) to implement ethical production consistently. In contrast, unionised workers generally earn more than non-unionised workers in Australia³³ and Aotearoa,³⁴ so even under capitalism, a working-class strategy

can better improve conditions.

Even when relatively 'ethical' options exist, they are often pricier. Paying workers slave wages, or packing chickens into inhumane pens, is simply cheaper. Ethical consumption therefore becomes a luxury niche, rather than a replacement for the megacorporations that operate with impunity.

We cannot buy our way out of capitalist exploitation. This is not to deny that consumer activism can be effective for targeted wins, such as ensuring supermarkets only stock free-range eggs. However, the power structures that produce abuses remain in place, and activists are left to put out individual fires while a global gang of arsonists operates with impunity.

Recently in Australia, newspapers revealed that significant amounts of recycling are dumped in landfills. The author of this article continued to diligently separate the recycling, fully aware that it may make no difference. In light of the controversy, federal and state representatives committed to making all Australian packaging reusable or recyclable by 2025. Sounds good. However, socialist newspaper *Green Left Weekly* pointed out that the distant date was not matched by clear mid-term commitments, and that goods being recyclable does not necessarily mean they will be recycled. *Green Left continued:*

There is a recycling crisis because the international "market price" for recyclable waste has collapsed. Individual households may see recycling

as a civic duty or a contribution to society. But governments and corporations see it as a market.

Moreover, *Green Left* argued, the generation of waste is the problem, not simply the failure to clean it up. A ban on single-use plastic containers would be more effective than the scramble to clean up the resulting waste. *Green Left* concluded that waste should be minimised at the production stage, not just the consumption stage.³⁵

Every stage in the "reduce, reuse, recycle" slogan would be hugely aided by changes to production, distribution and exchange which are outside the control of consumers:

- **Reduce:** Ban single-use plastic containers
- **Reuse:** Get rid of planned obsolescence
- **Recycle:** Actually recycle what we put in recycling bins

Consumers are not responsible for these problems, although we have a stake in solving them. If production were run democratically by worker and consumer co-ops, we could develop ethical ways to meet human needs, rather than burning through everything for profit. This isn't completely hypothetical; we do have living examples to build on. However, bluntly, "the global economy doesn't care about your local chicken farm."³⁶ Most land and resources remain controlled by monopoly capitalists, who will burn the planet before they cede control. A storm is brewing uncontrollably, our only choice is how to respond.

³¹ Caro Meldrum-Hanna et al, Labour exploitation, slave-like conditions found on farms supplying biggest supermarkets, *ABC News* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-04/supermarkets-food-outlets-exploit-black-market-migrant-workers/6441496>

³² Anon, Is Fair Trade flawed and unethical?, *GeoIssues* <http://geoissues.com/is-fair-trade-flawed-and-unethical-2>

³³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2013, ABS <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/99E5614783415356CA25713E000F92B1?OpenDocument>

³⁴ Bill Rosenberg, Economic Bulletin 194, *NZ Council of Trade Unions* <https://www.union.org.nz/economicbulletin194/>

³⁵ Alex Bainbridge, Solving the Recycling Crisis means Challenging Corporate Power, *Green Left Weekly* <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/solving-recycling-crisis-means-challenging-corporate-power>

³⁶ Anon, The global economy doesn't care about your local chicken farm, *Cold And Dark Stars* <https://colddarkstars.wordpress.com/2017/05/25/the-global-economy-doesnt-care-about-your-local-chicken-farm/>

10 **Personal vs private property or: Do communists want to take your stuff?**

Are the communists coming to take your property?

That all depends. What do you have?

This is a big question, especially if you have a home to store things in. To simplify, communists tend to distinguish between **personal property** and **private property**.

Personal property consists of things you use in everyday life, things that meet your basic needs, or bring you personal satisfaction. These may include:

1. Your toothbrush
2. Your house
3. Your author-signed copy of *Capital: Volume 1*

We support your right to personal property. Nobody should take what you need to survive, or to live a fulfilling life. Nobody wants your toothbrush.

That's not what communists mean when we rail against 'private property.' Private property consists of larger financial assets, things you most likely don't physically use yourself, but profit from owning. These may include:

4. A rental property
5. A textile mill
6. A weapons factory

If you own a rental property, we do want to take it from you. It's nothing personal. You may be a good landlord or a bad landlord, that's beside the point. The point is that you don't need the house, except to make a profit. And the profit system seems like a bad way of allocating housing; when the market booms, rent is too expensive, and people

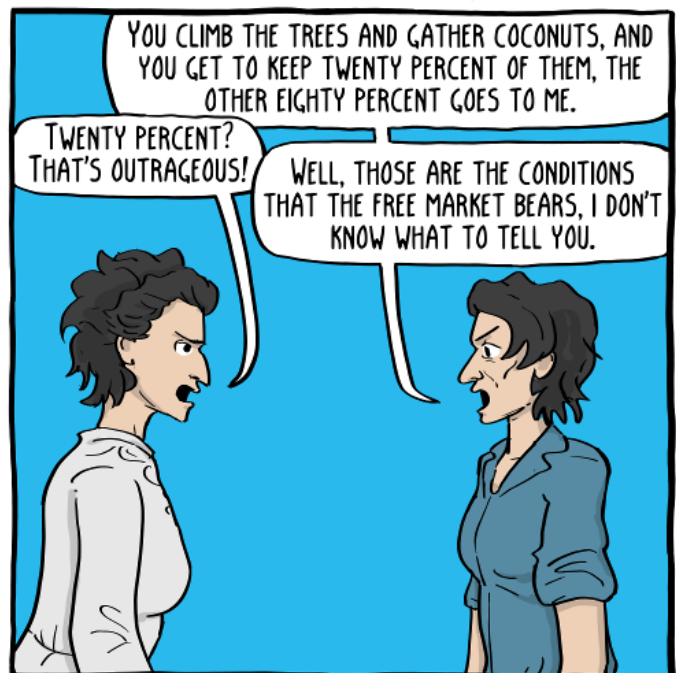
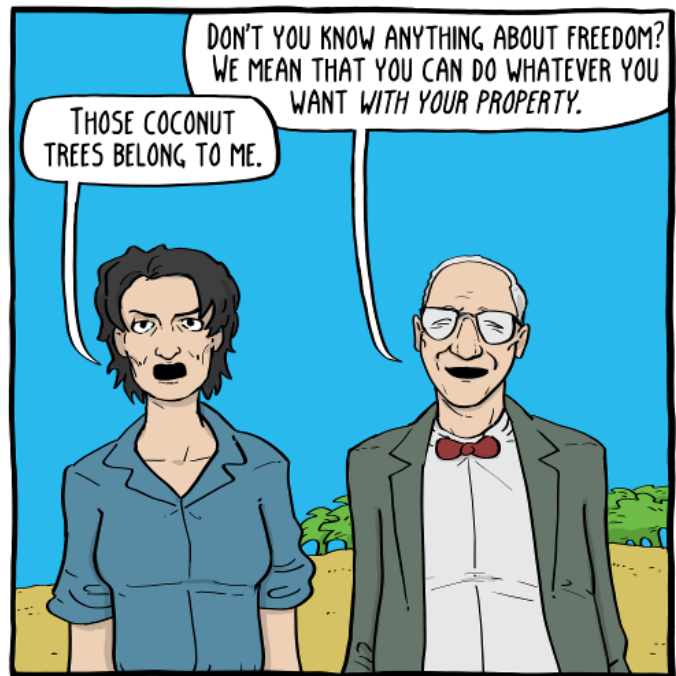
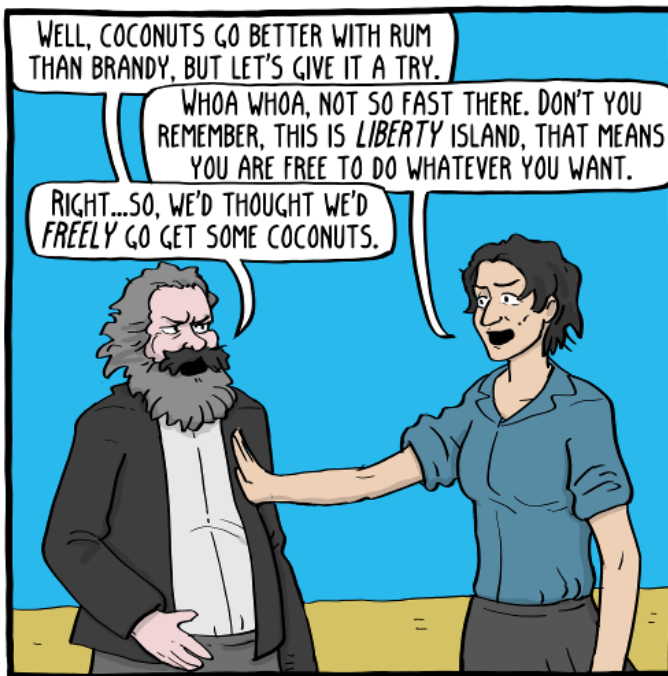
live on the streets; when the market crashes, banks call in loans, and people lose their houses. There doesn't seem to be any point in the market cycle where everyone has somewhere to sleep. Unless housing is collectively allocated, rather than privately.

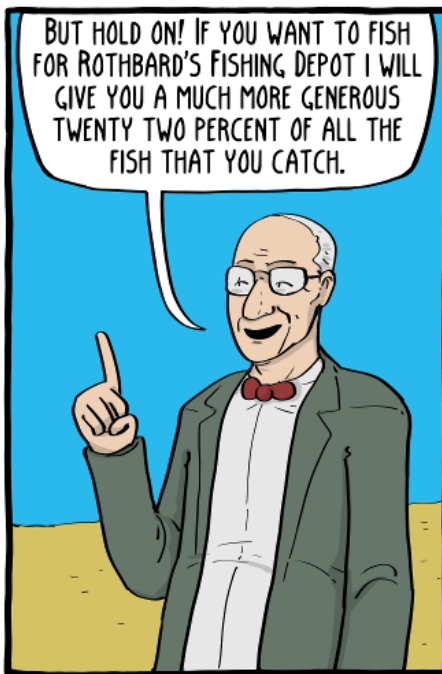
Perhaps you own a textile mill in Mumbai, drawing profits from garment workers paid less than 1 USD an hour. Any battle waged by garment workers to determine their own conditions receives our unqualified support, and we hope your 'rights' over their lives are rescinded.

If you own a weapons factory, we hope to turn it into a public museum, showcasing the horrors of a brutal past.

Existential Comics : Desert Island Economics







About Fightback (Aotearoa/ Australasia)

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

Fightback is a trans-Tasman organisation, operating in Aotearoa and Australia. In the modern era of free movement across the Tasman, “Australasia” is becoming a reality in a way it has not been since the 19th century. So many New Zealanders (tauiwi as well as tangata whenua) now live and work in Australia – and decisions made in one country increasingly impact the other, as the inter-governmental controversy surrounding the Manus Island detention camp shows.

We wish to engage socialists from both sides of the Tasman – in particular, socialists from Aotearoa living and working in Australia – to continue the lines of analysis and directions of organisation which we have been pursuing. Beyond the dogmas of “sect Marxism”; beyond national boundaries; towards a genuinely decolonised, democratic, feminist and queer-friendly anti-capitalism.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa and Australia through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tauiwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

10-Point Programme

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

1. **Constitutional transformation** based on indigenous self-determination and workers power. Indigenous and worker co-ops to operate as guardians over public resources.
2. **Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be supplemented with a Universal Basic Income, removal of punitive sanctions.
3. **International working-class solidarity.** Close the Detention Centres. Open borders to Australia and Aotearoa, full rights for migrant workers. Recognise Pasefika rights to self-determination, Australia and Aotearoa to contribute to a ‘no-strings’ development fund for Pacific nations. Opposition to all imperialist ventures and alliances; neither Washington nor Moscow.
4. **No revolution without women’s liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. **An ecosocialist solution to climate change.** End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
6. **Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7. **Abolish prisons,** replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
8. **Universal right to housing.** Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9. **Fully-funded healthcare at every level.** Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to “top-down” efforts to change working people’s behaviour.
10. **Fully-funded education** at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining indigenous knowledge as a core part of the curriculum.

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